

By Her Side by [takeyourtime_buthurryup](#)

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Summary:

This begins as an overlay of the Closing the Gate scene in 2.9 and continues into my fictional extended scene between El and Hopper (with a little Mike and Joyce).

By Her Side

Fear burned inside the chief's stomach as he stared at the stories high gate before them. Back at the Byers house El had been confident that she could close it but his doubt began to settle in his lungs like a pile of rocks. He saw how weak any exertion of her powers made her and even though she had grown much stronger this past year this was far beyond anything she had attempted. He couldn't help but feel like he'd rather fling himself off the lift before standing there beside her, watching helplessly as she destroyed herself, even if it was to save all of their lives. His skin started to crawl and he itched to hit the 'Up' button on the control panel, take El as far away from this shithole as he possibly could and he almost did until her tiny hand took his.

El could sense the fear radiating off of Hopper. He stood staring at the gate without blinking, perfectly still. She completely understood his hesitation, the confidence that had filled her back at Will's had significantly diminished when she saw how much bigger the gate was than before; Hop hadn't been exaggerating. Even with the advice her sister had given her, to channel her anger and use it as a source of strength (and she had plenty of anger), she knew this was going to be a challenge, one that she wasn't sure she was going to walk away from. The doubt she felt was written all over her guardian's face beside her. But his presence alone reassured her; she reached over and took his hand.

It was time. El squeezed Hops hand, hesitating a moment more before reluctantly letting go. She stepped forward, took a deep breath and outstretched her arm. Focusing all of her attention on visualizing the gate shrinking, she didn't even notice the blood begin to drip from her nose. All of a sudden, a huge shadow appeared just beyond on the entrance of the gate. El's concentration broke for a moment and she realized that this was the monster that had taken over Will. It roared, obviously infuriated by the attempt to trap it. Her heart was hammering so loud in her ears that she barely heard the growling that was growing louder all around her.

All Hopper could do was watch as this tiny girl faced down a 400-foot shadow demon. The thing loomed in front of them pissed as hell.

Its thunderous roar reverberated around them but a shrill growl from off to the left had the chief spinning. He raised his gun and shown his flashlight on the walls of the pit searching for the, what did Dustin call them? Demo-dogs? Suddenly, the lift jolted violently, Hopper turned around, saw one clinging to the top of the lift and lit its ass up, its menacing growl-turned-shriek fading as the creature fell. Another one leapt onto the lift and quickly met the same fate. Within the beam of the flashlight Hop saw more demo-dogs scaling the walls. "Oh, shit!" In an array of bullets, he took them out one by one. Once that gun emptied he quickly switched to his shotgun and continued firing. Even with the gun blasts ringing in his ears he heard El begin to breathe heavily and then scream.

The edges of the gate were closing in, but slowly. El could feel her strength fading and a new wave of fear washed over her as she watched the shadow monster reach a smoky tendril out to her. As it drew closer, feelings of guilt and shame weighed on her heart, flashes of all the mistakes she made and people who have been hurt because of her invaded her mind. The pain it brought her was unbearable and she almost gave up right then and there but then, mercifully, Kali's words echoed between her ears. The guilt and shame fueled the anger underneath, igniting it into burning rage. Fury coursed through her veins and power exploded within her. Without even realizing it, El began to scream. With both hands now extended, feeling lighter and stronger than she had ever felt before, using every last bit of energy she had, she let go, releasing all of the hurt, betrayal, and heartbreak she had ever carried within her until everything went black.

The scream made Hoppers blood run cold. He turned slowly and what he saw filled him with a strange mix of pride and terror: El, her feet several inches above the floor of the lift, her face ashen and covered in blood, arms outstretched, exuding a kind of tangible power he didn't think was possible. That power was collected in an explosive force that corralled the shadow monster, funneling it back through the gate which sealed shut a split second later. My God she did it!

He turned to her just in time to see her drop back to the floor. She landed on her feet but, completely exhausted, her legs gave out from under her. He dove just as she crumpled to the ground. Panic threatened to stop his heart as he held her, limp in his arms. He

turned her head to face him, shaking her a little more aggressively than he meant to. "El! Eleven, look at me! El, sweetheart, look at me, open your eyes!" and a moment later she, thankfully, obeyed. Her lashes fluttered and with bloodshot eyes she looked up at him and smiled weakly. Hop pulled her close, relief and pride flooding through him as she clung to him. "You did good, kid. You did so good." He kissed her cheek and held her tighter.

They stayed like that for a few moments more until he felt her arms slacken from around his neck. He went to pull away but she leaned into his chest, too exhausted to hold herself up. "Tired," she whispered, so quietly he almost missed it. "It's okay, El. You're going to be okay," he reassured her as he scooped her into his arms. He stood, cradling her gently as he reached for the control panel. He hit the button and the lift started to ascend, much too slowly for his liking. "We're gonna get you home, you're gonna be just fine." Her heavy eyelids drooped and he could tell she was struggling to fight off sleep. "Mike.... Will okay?.... Have to go back..." she mumbled. "It's okay, just rest. Everything is fine now, you did so good."

By the time the lift made it to the top she was already sound asleep, breathing deeply. Hopper navigated his way back through the building quickly but carefully, being sure not to jostle El too much. He stopped for only a moment when he came to Dr. Owens who was still in the stairwell. "Hey doc, you still doing okay? Tourniquet holding up?" He was a bit paler than when the chief first passed him but he nodded his head yes. "Well, she did it!" Hop boasted, motioning to the sleeping girl in his arms. "Asses are saved. She closed the gate, dogs are all gone. I'm gonna get her out of here and send you some help. Can you hold on a few more minutes?" he asked. The doctor shook his head again and gave a small thumbs-up. "Okay, hang in there." Hopper started up the stairs again but paused and turned to face Owens once more. "Oh hey, don't forget to think about what I mentioned earlier, okay? Great!" and without waiting for a reply or even a nod of the head the chief turned and walked on.

Back at the truck, Hopper gently shifted El in his arms and opened the door. As he was buckling her in he felt her trembling and noticed her breathing had become shaky. He grabbed one of her hands, startled to find it ice cold. Quickly, he searched through the back of his truck and found a couple woolen emergency blankets. After curling them around her tiny frame, he got into the driver's seat, started the truck and blasted the heat.

As the chief sped down the road heading towards the cabin he began to hear sirens and soon passed an ambulance that was headed toward the facility, the one he called for Dr. Owens. Hop started to wonder what the doctor would say, how he'd explain what happened, if he would betray Eleven or do as he was asked and leave El alone to live a normal life. Hopper looked over to her, still in a deep sleep. A pit of worry opened in his chest when he reached over and took one her hands, finding it still frozen. He didn't let go until they reached the cabin.

He wrapped the blankets tighter around El and held her close hoping to keep the cold night air off of her. The usually short walk from the truck to the cabin felt like a frigid eternity so he was beyond thankful to find the interior still piping hot even though Nancy and the Byers had already left. Hopper had radioed to them right after calling the ambulance to check in with them. Will was doing fine and they were headed back home to update the others. Even though he knew how badly Mike would want to see El and how pissed they would be for once again being kept apart, Hop asked Joyce to make sure he and the rest of the kids all went home. El needed rest, he needed rest, and honestly, Hop had really missed El and just wanted to spend some time with her alone.

Softly, Hopper laid El down on her bed. His heart sank as he looked down at her pale face smeared with blood and makeup, lips blue with cold. He went back out to the living room and grabbed one of the space heaters the Byers had left and put it right beside her bed, turning it on full blast. Rummaging through the drawers, he found a thick pair of socks and one of his flannels. Hop returned to her side and unwrapped the blankets from around her. He pulled off her sneakers and slipped the extra socks on, gently slid her arms out of her coat, replaced it with the worn flannel and swiftly returned the blankets to her with the quilt to top it. After double checking everything he could do to make her warm he grabbed a rag and a bowl of hot water, dragged a chair over and delicately began to wash away the blood and makeup. Twice he had to get fresh water before her face was clean again but he was happy to see that her lips were no longer blue and some color had returned to her cheeks, her breathing once again slow and deep. He ran his fingers through her slicked back hair bringing out the curls. He smiled faintly, thinking back to their conversation in the truck earlier. He hadn't been lying when he said he didn't hate the new look. It was pretty cool, or

‘bitchin’ as she said, but sitting here now after all that they had been through, all she had been through, he definitely preferred El like this – clean face and natural hair, just a normal kid.

There beside her the rest of the night he switched between holding her hand or stroking her hair, he read a little bit of “Anne of Green Gables” to her as well. With each hour that passed, though, Hopper grew more anxious. He knew how exhausted Eleven was and that she needed sleep but she hadn’t moved a muscle since they got home. He lost track of how many times he checked to see if she was still breathing just to make himself feel like he was being productive. Morning came and went with no change and around 4pm he found himself at the tail end of his third pack of camels for the day. He had just dropped the butt of his last cigarette when the phone rang making him jump. “Son of a bitch!” He stormed back inside and yanked the phone off the hook. “Yeah?” he barked harshly.

“Hopper?”

“Yeah, hey Joyce, sorry...uh... hey how’s, uh, how’s Will doing?”

“He’s okay, he’s doing good. The boys ended up staying here last night and they’re hanging out. How’s Eleven?”

Hopper blanched, his bones turned to lead and he dropped the phone away from his ear, running his hand down his face, he let out a strained breath. Turning toward El’s room he saw that she still hadn’t moved. Panic had officially set in.

“Hop... Hop? Hopper?” The chief quickly brought the phone back to his ear.

“Sorry Joyce. Yeah, um... she’s okay... uh, I mean I, I don’t know she’s still asleep, so yeah... but yeah, she’s okay...”

“Are you okay, Hop?” That he didn’t have an answer to. Even if he did he didn’t get the chance to reply.

“Mrs. Byers, is that Hopper?!” It was Mike.

Closing his eyes, Hop leaned his head against the wall attempting to come up with an explanation as he listened to Mike wrestle the phone from Joyce.

“Chief, let me talk to El!” Mike sounded as frantic as Hop felt but he wasn’t about to let him know that.

“Calm down kid. Now’s not a good time.” he said slowly.

“What? Why not? Is she okay? Let me talk to her!”

“She’s fine, she’s still asleep.”

“I need to see her.”

“I know, but like I said, now is not a good time. I will bring her to see

you all when she's ready, okay."

"Why isn't it a good time? Why can't I just come see her?"

Hopper's patience had long since gone but he remained calm, he understood the kid's desire to be by her side cause that's where he wanted to be too, not on this damn phone. "What she needs right now is time and rest. If you care about her you will give her what she needs and I swear to you, you will see her the moment she's up for it. Understand?"

"This is such bullshit!"

"Do you understand?" No answer. "Mike. Do you under—"

"Yeah, okay! Whatever!"

"Good, now put Joyce back on the phone." Hopper could hear the phone switch hands and Mike stomping away.

"Hop?"

"Will you make sure he doesn't do anything stupid?"

"Yeah, he'll be fine. But you didn't answer me before, are you okay?"

After a short pause he answered the only way he could. "I'll keep you posted." He slammed the phone into the hook nearly knocking it off the wall and stormed back into El's room. Even after all that she still hadn't moved.

Hopper collapsed into the chair next to her bed and rested his head in one palm while holding El's hand in the other. He stayed like that with no idea how much time was passing while every single worst-case-scenario ran through his mind. Without realizing it, tears had silently begun to run down his face as memories of his sweet Sara came in flashes. It was just yesterday that he had been sitting beside her hospital bed holding her hand. The pain of losing her was almost too much to bear and he knew he wouldn't be able to get through it a second time. He was on the verge of a mental breakdown when his hand was squeezed by the tiny one he was holding.

"The black hole didn't get me." It was barely a whisper but Hopper knew he would never forget the sound as long as he lived. In a flash he was kneeling beside her pulling her into a bone crushing bear hug. El curled into him burying her head in his shoulder. As he held her he couldn't help but laugh with relief.

"It's about time, kid. You scared the shit outta me." He finally pulled away and looked into her big brown eyes. "How you feeling? You okay?"

"Crying."

"What?"

"You're crying." She said and wiped a tear track from his cheek, showing him the water on her hand. Hopper quickly sat back and dried off his face with his sleeve.

"Oh no that's nothing, I was just worried you were gonna sleep forever and I was gonna have to eat all of the Eggos by myself." At the sound of 'Eggos' El's eyes got even bigger. "Yeah, you want some?" She shook her head, very serious. "Okay, coming right up," Hopper stood and started for the door but stopped suddenly. Slowly, he turned around and knelt by El's side again. "Hey, I uh, I want you to have this." He took her hand and slid the blue hair band from his wrist onto hers. "It belonged to my girl, Sara. You know I loved her very much and miss her every day. It's, uh, pretty special and I want you to have it." He looked at her and sighed. "I am really, really glad you're okay, El." He watched as she ran her fingers across the tiny braided band. After a moment she looked up at him, smiled, and kissed him on the cheek. He returned the smile and squeezed her hand before heading to the kitchen.